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ABSTRACT

Four years ago, the College of St. Catherine, a small private college in St. Paul, merged with St. Mary's, a 2-year college. The College of St. Catherine plans to use the 2-year college campus to start a program for single parents. A survey (with a 44 percent response) of the 126 single parents currently enrolled showed that they have enough support from family and friends to make it through school, but that they need odd-hours child care and emotional and social support. Based on the results of the survey, the college has proposed providing housing specially designed for 25 single-parent students and their children within walking distance of the St. Mary's campus. Ideally, there would be a day care center or several family day care homes also within walking distance. The program would be staffed by an administrator and an aide, who would oversee the program, pursue funding sources, and serve as a liaison to community resources in order to reduce stress and increase the potential for success for students. At present, possible sites are being explored and funding sources for the program are being pursued. (KC)

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Planning a Single Parents Program for a Two-Year Campus at a Private College

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Status of Single Parents in Minnesota

One-third of the single parent families in the Twin Cities metropolitan area lives in poverty. A Wilder Foundation Study reports that

> several factors contribute to the low economic status of single mothers and inhibit the ability of single mothers to attain higher incomes. The most notable factors revealed in this survey include: low educational attainment levels; the concentration of single mothers in low-paying occupations that offer limited opportunities for advancement; health problems, particularly among AFDC mothers; and inadequate financial support of children by their absent parent.

It has also been found that low basic skills and limited English skills are closely associated with the disenfranchisement of African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic, and other low-income communities. The impacts extend to the next generation of children, and are linked to a host of other problems.

These facts point to a major policy issue which has been identified by the Minnesota Department of Education:

> How will activities that support personal and family needs be linked or integrated with child and adult education to reduce barriers to learning?

Welfare and employment and training programs are looking for more two-year education programs to help individuals leave poverty. St. Mary's Campus at the College of St. Catherine provides academic support to the marginal

applicant, making it ideally suited to the needs of part of the single parent population.

St. Mary's Campus

The College of St. Catherine, a four-year liberal arts college for women, merged with St. Mary's Junior College four years ago. St. Mary's Campus, as it is now called, is a small, coeducational, urban campus designed to help students with special needs succeed: special admissions programs, financial aid, individual counseling and learning assistance programs are provided. St. Mary's offers programs in health care and human services which are responsive to changes occuring in health care today. Students graduate with associate of arts degrees in nursing, physical therapy assistant, occupational therapy assistant, medical records technology, etc.

St. Mary's is unusually suited to serving single parents who are trying to attain self-sufficiency for the following reasons:

* Two-year programs are attractive in terms of time and energy investment.

* The student retention rate is 60%, compared to a 39% state average at community colleges.

* Ninety percent of the second year students have jobs secured before they graduate.

* Starting salaries, based on 1987 figures, range from $7.50 to $10.75 an hour.

* Because the typical St. Mary's student is non-traditional--juggling family and work with their studies--faculty and staff are trained to be

sensitive to students that might need help. At St. Catherine's, for example, we expect the student to take responsibility to seek help. St. Mary's assumes some of that responsibility so that students can achieve their academic goals in a timely way.

Planning Funds

The grants officer at St. Catherine's heard about the Goddard program in Vermont and thought we could try something similar at St. Mary's. The idea of providing comprehensive services to help single parents attain self-sufficiency through a two-year education program was appealing to funders. Funders especially liked the idea of fostering linkages among government, community and educational organizations to serve this population. We were able to raise $20,000 in planning money in order to hire housing and social service consultants and architects and to conduct a needs assessment on current single parent students.

Student Survey Results

In December we invited selected single parent students to attend forums to discuss their needs with us. One forum focused on housing, the other on daycare and other needs. As an incentive, we offered to cover the cost of childcare for the duration of the meetings plus an extra two hours. Although written invitations were sent and follow-up calls were made, only three students came. This should not have surprised us because single parent students, by the very nature of their lives, typically do not have time to attend extra events such as forums.

While the results are only anecdotal, we did get a sense of the incredible fortitude it takes to be a single parent on AFDC in higher education. Students get up to study at 4:00 a.m. or begin their studies late at night. All daycare arrangements are made well in advance. If a child becomes ill and no childcare is available, classes are missed. If a car breaks down and public transportation takes too long, classes are missed or a test postponed, complicating life further. These students lives' are vulnerable to the typical changes and surprises of everyday life.

In February we surveyed all 126 single parent students on financial aid at St. Mary's, about 18% of the total student population. (See appendix for specific results.) There was a 44% response rate that confirmed what we suspected from the December forums. While these students have a diversity of needs, they have enough support from family, friends and relatives to just make it through school. The majority have reliable cars and sufficient housing and can rely on friends or neighbors for emergencies. Many of the respondents, in fact, were not interested in moving to the neighborhood because they were already well situated or lived in the suburbs and had fears about living in the heart of Minneapolis.

These students do have definite needs for odd-hour childcare and emotional and social support. Odd-hour daycare is necessary for students who must take early morning clinicals in hospitals in support of their school work. Emotional support and counseling are available at St. Mary's, but scheduling problems prevent students from using the services. Personal beliefs that it is important to handle problems oneself or that these issues

cannot be discussed with a stranger are also barriers.

During the December forums, the students were surprised that other students were in similar situations and found it gratifying to know they were not alone. We suggested that a special support group be formed on campus, but the students said that they would never be able to juggle their schedules. Besides, being with their children and studying were more important than finding support for themselves. Living near campus with other single parents and having access to regular and odd-hour childcare would reduce scheduling hassles and enable a community of support to occur.

The target population for a single parents program would not only be those without decent housing or reliable transportation, but those without the support and people connections that provide a "safety net" for current students. A former employee of the college now working for a local school district informed us of a population of 17 and 18 year old single parents who had academic potential but few resources to think about continuing their education. A single parents program would fit their needs well.

Vision for a Single Parents Program

Based on the results of the student survey, we would like to provide housing specially designed for 25 single parent students and their children within walking distance of the St. Mary's Campus. The apartments would be organized as private units with some common space for meetings, support groups and studying. The apartments themselves could be designed with a children's play area in the center and windows from the kitchens overlooking the play area.

Ideally, we would have one daycare center or several family daycare homes for the program also within walking distance of the campus. St. Mary's is the only educational institution in our five-state region that offers certificate training in infant and toddler care. The daycare center could serve as a lab-site for this program and be supplemented by student interns.

The program would be staffed by 1.5 FTE administrators. A part-time person would continue to tap funding sources for the maintenance and development of the program and coordinate welfare and job-corps subsidies from the counties. The full-time coordinator would be responsible for working with the residential participants in resolving problems that are barriers to academic success, facilitate a sense of support among the residents, bring in outside resources to provide information on needed resources, serve as liaison to community resources such as legal aid, health care, etc., and extend the resources developed to the broader population of single parents enrolled at St. Mary's. This would help reduce stress and increase the potential for success for all students who are parents at St. Mary's.

If the program appears successful after the initial two or three years, our plan is to develop outreach with Greater Minnesota. There is an urgent need for health care workers in rural Minnesota, as well as educational opportunities for single parents on AFDC. Single parents from Greater Minnesota could come to St. Mary's for part of their education and undertake their clinicals and a few classes by technological means in their home towns. Transitional programs would be provided to help students overcome fears of

city life and adjust to a new environment. This is a long-term idea that has generated interest in several of the foundations we have talked to.

Community and Government Resources

All the government and community organizations we met with were supportive of the single parents program concept. Most thought that government funding for childcare would increase because the need continues to grow every year. There is a shift in thinking about welfare reform also. Terms such as "long-term solutions" and "comprehensive approach" have been used. There is growing acknowledgment of the need for an integrated approach to solve the problems of low-income single parents, because the issues of childcare, transportation, education and economic self-sufficiency are interrelated. The single parents program model is on the forefront of this thinking.

We found that there is competition for funding among state, county and city levels with the decrease in federal funding during the past decade. This is especially true in the area of childcare. Each county distributes childcare assistance as it sees fit. St. Mary's exists in Hennepin County, which provides childcare subsidies through the STRIDE program on a first-come, first-serve basis. There is a waiting list of 3,000 parents waiting for childcare assistance in Hennepin County. Ramsey County (home of St. Paul) divides its funding into specific programs to ensure that subsidies will see a person through their training/education period. We learned that students on AFDC can come from any county to St. Mary's and use the county-of-origin funding--as long as it is agreed upon in the recipient's original

educational plan.

There is interest in the concept of this program on the state and city levels. The state department of Jobs and Training appears to have more flexibility to assist this program than does Human Services. City Council members in Minneapolis are supportive, and Community Block Development Grants might be available. Minneapolis is developing a 20-year Plan which will supply funding to community organizations working together to solve local problems. It is our hope that the Single Parents Program is eligible for this funding. Overall, there appears to be small pots of funding that we can seek from various government resources. Our question now is which types of funding would be long-term and sustainable?

Community institutions are also interested. St. Mary's Campus is a neighbor to the Riverside Medical Complex (RMC), which offers clinicals and hires graduates of St. Mary's for its hospital staff. Riverside Medical Complex would like to see us succeed in this program and has offered us odd-hour childcare in its daycare center. RMC has several foundations from which we will seek assistance.

United Way of Minneapolis provided us with a portion of the planning money and is interested in the "multi-agency" approach to solving social and economic problems, especially if we work with existing organizations funded by United Way.

Housing and Childcare Sites

St. Mary's is located in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, one of the most powerful, activist-oriented neighborhoods in the city. According to a

recent study, the number of children in the community has increased 600% during the past few years because of newly rehabilitated and available housing. The neighborhood is generally low-income with much subsidized housing and a large population of single parent families.

We have joined the neighborhood task-force on childcare to seek neighborhood support for the single parents program and to see if we can forge any partnerships on the childcare issue. Neighborhood leaders who once fought the local institutions over land use are now working together to address the common need of childcare. Neighborhood leaders are skeptical of large daycare centers and more in favor of family daycare homes. We are aware that we cannot open a program and exacerbate further the dearth of childcare resources in the neighborhood. We will gain neighborhood support when we bring forth more childcare resources.

One remote possibility is parkland adjacent to the St. Mary's Campus. It appears as if the land is part of the campus, but it is not. The neighborhood might be interested in building a neighborhood center with childcare on the park property. It is notoriously difficult, however, to acquire parkland from Hennepin County!

Housing possibilites are more promising at present. A large apartment building is being constructed and seven units are being set aside for the Single Parents Program. The apartments would be on the ground level next to the courtyard so that the children would have access to a play area. There is also a ten-unit apartment building available for leasing. This building is across the street from a park, which would again provide some play area.

Both housing sites are within four blocks of St. Mary's. Currently, we plan to lease the building and the seven units in the larger building. Since these apartments are rented at market rates, we will have to raise rent subsidies to help students pay their rents.

There is a site available to design and build a housing unit for 10-15 families. Since this site is owned by the city, we would need to work very closely and carefully with the neighborhood organization. The neighborhood organization uses zero-based planning, so this process could take several years.

Conclusion

We have come to the end of our planning phase, and are now ready to pursue funding sources. The program initially might start out small, depending on how much funding we can raise. We might be able to raise funds to support seven families in one of the apartment sites, for example. While it will be easier to provide housing, we will continue to exhaust all possibilities for developing more childcare in the neighborhood. Forming partnerships with the City of Minneapolis, the Archdiocese, or United Way would help share the risk and cost of this program. We believe the project will be successful and become more attractive to both private and public funders as the program is expanded to serve 25 single parent students and their families.

THE COLLEGE OF ST. CATHERINE
St. Paul, Minnesota

APPENDIX

The College of St. Catherine is exploring the possibility of starting a Single Parents Program at St. Mary's Campus in the fall of 1991. To help us plan for the program, we need to have a clear sense of the specific circumstances and needs of single parents such as yourself.

Your responses are confidential and will be analyzed as part of all the responses we receive.

Please circle the letter that most closely fits your answer. Feel free to write next to the question if our options do not fit your situation.

1. In which program at St. Mary's are (were) you enrolled?

53% Nursing

2. How many children you have? (Of total Single Parent population)

a. One — 51% have 1
b. Two — 36% have 2
c. Three — 15% have 3
d. Four — 4% have 4
e. Five
f. More than five

3. What are your children's ages? (Of 56 respondents)

First child_____ — 14 or 25% were infant/toddler (0-3)
Second child_____ — 20 or 36% were pre-school
Third child_____
Fourth child_____
Fifth child_____
Other _____

4. What type of childcare arrangements do you have?

Most have in-home (neighbor/relative) - 39%
Daycare - 30%
A couple have older children watching younger children

5. How do you pay for childcare? (Do you depend on any outside funds? Please specify.)

15 or 27% pay out of their own pocket; 20 or 36% get assistance from government programs or financial aid; 16 or 28% pay nothing; 2 or 3% get money from the father

6. **How many hours per day do you use childcare?**
   1 - 5 hrs. 18 or 32%
   6 - 10 hrs. 17 or 30% 11 - 15 hrs. 4 or 7%

7. **How do you cover odd-hour childcare (e.g., early morning, evening hours)?**

   26 or 46% use friends, relatives, or father of the child; 14 or 25% say they don't cover odd-hour childcare.

8. **How are your children cared for when they are ill?**

   27 or 48% stay home with children; 20 or 36% use relatives or friends; 3 or 5% say kids stay alone.

9. **What city and county do you live in?**

   23 or 41% live in Hennepin; 11 or 20% live in Ramsey; remainder in surrounding seven counties.

10. **What type of housing do you live in?**

a.	apartment	23 or 41%
b.	house	24 or 43%
c.	condominium	2
d.	other	7

11. **Do you have a car?**

a. yes	46 or 82%
b. no	9 or 16%

12. **Is it generally reliable?**

a. yes	41 or 73%
b. no	5 or 9%

13. **If you had the opportunity to live in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood near the St. Mary's campus, would you do so?**

a. yes	21 or 37%
b. no	35 or 62%

14. **If you would prefer not to, what are your reasons?**
   Of 35 respondents who said "no" - 12 or 34% own/have a house; 8 or 23% say neighborhood is unsafe, don't like living in city, and don't like Minneapolis school system; 6 or 17% don't want their kids to change schools.

15. What kind of health insurance do you have?

29 or 52% have medical assistance; 10 or 18% have no health insurance; others have other kinds such as PHP

16. How is your health insurance paid for?

25 or 45% get county assistance (medical assistance, AFDC); 11 didn't answer this question.

17. Which of the following governmental/community services do you use?

23 a. Housing subsidy program (41%)
16 b. Childcare subsidy program (28%)
11 c. STRIDE (20%)
13 d. Other (please specify) (23%)
17 - no answer

18. Which of the following services do you use at St. Mary's?

1 a. Learning Assistance
10 b. Crossroads (18%)
54 c. Financial Aid (96%)
5 d. Counseling (9%)
11 e. Academic Advising (20%)
2 f. Resident and Student Services
1 g. Visually Impaired Program
0 h. Hearing Impaired Program

19. Are you on A.F.D.C.?

29 a. yes (52%)
25 b. no (45%)

20. If so, through which county?

22 didn't respond; 16 or 28% in Hennepin; 7 or 12% in Ramsey.

21. If you had your choice about childcare, which would you prefer? Please rank according to preference, with "1" being your first choice.

2 a. Daycare center close to home
4 b. Daycare center close to school
3 c. Family daycare home near home
5 d. Family daycare center near school
1 e. Family members take care of children

22. What kind of assistance could you use to which you currently have no access, or for which use is difficult due to scheduling circumstances?

12 a. legal aid (21%)
21 b. emotional/social support (37%)
12 c. counseling (21%)
27 d. odd-hour daycare (48%)
11 e. other (please explain) Food stamps, computer training, more financial aid, scholarships, medical assistance, health care, outside funds for daycare, help with housing.

23. What is your income? $ See below.

24. If you are no longer in school, why did you leave?

N/A

THANKS FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!

INCOME PER MONTH

16	$400-500	(28%)
9	$500-600	(16%)
6	$600-700	(10%)
4	$700-900	(7%)
11	$901 or more	(20%)

--(44% have incomes less than $600/mo.)